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(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB99/02157 (22) International Filing Date: 6 July 1999 (06.07.99) (30) Priority Data: 9814620.2 6 July 1998 (06.07.98) GB (71) Applicants (for all designated States except US): KARO BIO AB [SE/SE]; Novum, S-141 57 Huddinge (SE). DEAN, John, Paul [GB/GB]; Withers & Rogers, Goldings House, 2 Hays Lane, London SE1 2HW (GB). (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): HAYRY, Pekka [FI/FI]; Transplantation Surgery and Immunology, Transplantation Laboratory, Haartmaninkatu 3, P.O. Box 21, FIN-00014 University of Helsinki (FI). MAKELA, Sari [FI/FI]; Turun Yliopisto, Biolääketiede, Anatomia, Kiinamyllynkaty 10, FIN-20520 Turku (FI). GUSTAFSSON, Jan-Ake [SE/SE]; Karolinski Institute, Novum, S-151 57 Huddinge (SE). (74) Agents: DEAN, John, Paul et al.; Withers & Rogers, Goldings House, 2 Hays Lane, London SE1 2HW (GB).		(81) Designated States: AU, CA, JP, KR, NZ, US, European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE). Published <i>Without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report.</i>
(54) Title: VASCULOPROTECTOR (57) Abstract The invention relates to a method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in a subject, the method comprising treating the subject with an ER β agonist.		

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WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

1

VASCULOPROTECTOR

This invention relates to the use of ligands of the second estrogen receptor, ER β , or compounds which affect ER β for vasculoprotection, that is to say in inducing protective effects in the vascular wall particularly in fibroproliferative disorders (such as atherosclerosis, arteriosclerosis, diabetic and autoimmune angiopathies), after injury (such as restenosis after angioplasty and bypass surgery) and in chronic allograft rejection.

Recently, a second estrogen receptor, ER β , has been revealed (WO97/09348).

Vascular intimal dysplasia and remodelling are characteristic features of reinjury following balloon angioplasty, coronary bypass surgery (Holmes, D. *et al.* Am J Cardiol (1984); 53: 77C-81C, Holmes, D. *et al.* J Am Coll Cardiol (1988); 22: 1149-55), and in chronic allograft rejection (Lemström KB, Koskinen PK. Circulation (1997); 96: 1240-1249, Häyry, P. *et al.* Immunol Rev (1993) Aug; 134: 33-81, Häyry P. *et al.* Faseb J (1993); 7: (11): 1055-60). The initial response to vascular injury is inflammatory and involves the attraction of lymphocytes, macrophages and thrombocytes to the site of injury and the secretion of cytokines, eicosanoids and growth factors (Ross, R. Nature (1993); 362(6423): 801-9). Under the influence of growth factors and cytokines, smooth muscle cells (SMC) proliferate and migrate from the media into the intima and contribute to intimal hyperplasia and stenosis.

Estrogen has several protective effects on the vascular wall (Farhat MY *et al.* J Pharmacol Exp Ther (1996); 276: 652-7). Some of these are rapid, presumably direct membrane effects, whereas others require transcriptional activation of genes (Farhat MY. *et al.* Biochem Pharmacol (1996); 51(5): 571-6). The inhibitory effect of estrogen on the replication, migration and extracellular matrix deposition by vascular smooth muscle cells, the key event in vascular fibroproliferative dysplasias, is presumably a genomic effect mediated through a variety of mechanisms including regulation of several growth factors and/or their receptors and possibly by a direct antiproliferative effect of estrogen on smooth muscle cells (Farhat MY, *et al.* Faseb J (1996); 10(5): 615-24).

WO 00/01716

2

PCT/GB99/02157

The vasculoprotective effect of estrogen was first demonstrated in population studies in humans, where estrogen replacement therapy demonstrated a protective effect on atherosclerotic vascular disease in post menopausal women (Stampfer M J *et al* (1991) *N. Engl. J. Med.* 325: 756-762; Grady D *et al.* (1992) *Ann. Intern. Med.* 117: 1016-1037), as later confirmed in monkeys (Wagner JD *et al.* *Metabolism* (1997); 46(6): 698-705). Later, the vasculoprotective effect has been documented in more detail in animal models and *in vitro*. Estrogen has been found to inhibit the intimal thickening after mechanical carotid balloon injury in rabbits (Foegh ML *et al.* *J Vasc Surg* (1994); 19(4): 722-6), rats (Chen SJ. *et al* *Circulation* (1996); 93(3): 577-84) and in mice (Sullivan TJ *et al.* *J Clin Invest* (1995); 96: 2482-8), as well as the immunologically-induced vascular fibroproliferative dysplasia in rabbit aorta (Cheng LP. *et al.* *Transplantation* (1991); 52(6): 967-72) and heart (Foegh ML. *et al.* *Transplant Proc* (1987): 90-5) allografts. *In vitro*, it has been demonstrated that estrogen inhibits migration and replication of vascular smooth muscle cells (Akishita M *et al.* *Atherosclerosis* (1997); 130(1-2): 1-10, Kolodgie FD, *et al.* *Am J Pathol* (1996); 148(3): 969-76, Morey AK. *et al.* *Endocrinology* (1997); 138(8): 3330-9, Suzuki A, *et al.* *Cardiovasc Res* (1996); 32(3): 516-23). These observations are consistent with findings in reporter gene assays that functional estrogen receptors are expressed in vascular smooth muscle cells of bovine (Balica M. *et al.* *Circulation* (1997); 95(7): 1954-60, rat ((Bayard F. *et al.* *Endocrinology* (1995); 136(4): 1523-9, Bayard F. *et al.* *Ciba Found Symp* (1995); 191(122): 122-32, Bei M *et al.* *J Steroid Biochem Mol Biol* (1996); 58(1): 83-8), guinea pig (Bhalla RC, *et al.* *Am J Physiol* (1997): H1996-2003), and human (Karas RH. *et al.* *Febs Lett* (1995); 377(2): 103-8) origin.

In addition to being anti-proliferative and anti-migratory to smooth muscle cells, estrogen may also display vasculoprotective effects via the vascular wall endothelium. Functional estrogen receptors have been demonstrated in endothelial cells (Venkov CD *et al.* *Circulation* (1996); 94: 727-33). Estrogen downregulates cytokine-induced adhesion molecule expression in human endothelium *in vitro* (Caulin GT. *et al.* *J Clin Invest* (1996); 98(1): 36-42), it is anti-apoptotic to endothelial cells (Spyridopoulos, I *et al.* *Circulation* (1997); 95(6): 1505-14) and it enhances functional endothelial recovery after denudation assay *in vivo* (Krasinski K *et al.* *Circulation* (1997); 95(7): 1768-72).

WO 00/01716

3

PCT/GB99/02157

There are also additional, indirect pathways whereby estrogen may mediate vasculoprotective effects. In addition to being directly anti-proliferative to smooth muscle cells and protective to the vascular endothelial cells, the estrogen effect may be mediated indirectly via lipoprotein metabolism and via promoting vasodilation by stimulating prostacyclin and nitric oxide synthesis and via regulation of the cell membrane voltage-dependent calcium channels resulting in inhibition of extracellular calcium mobilization and flux (see Farhat MY, *et al.* J Pharmacol Exp Ther (1996); 276(2): 652-7, Farhat MY, *et al.* Biochem Pharmacol (1996); 51(5): 571-6). None of these mechanisms alone explain the beneficial effect of estrogen. For example, although the endothelial nitric oxide synthetase (e-NOS) mRNA and protein are upregulated in vascular endothelium by estrogen *in vitro* (MacRitchie AN, *et al.* Circ Res (1997); 81(3): 355-62), the effect is only partially inhibited by the e-NOS inhibitor NAME (Holm P *et al.* J Clin Invest (1997); 100(4): 821-8).

The development of vasculoprotective drug therapies based on the protective effect of estrogen has been difficult, as it has not been possible to differentiate the desired vasculoprotective effect of estrogen from its undesirable effects on the reproductive system - e.g. its uterotrophic effect.

Recent work on the vasculoprotective effect of estrogen in ER α -deficient mice by lafrati and coworkers (lafrati MD *et al.* Nat Med (1997); 3(5): 545-8), suggests that ER α may not be responsible for the vasculoprotective estrogenic response.

The inventors have unexpectedly managed to differentiate the vasculoprotective effect of estrogen from its uterotrophic effect using ligands with different binding affinity to ER α and ER β . The inventors have discovered that the genistein, an isoflavonic phytoestrogen, which shows approximately 20 x higher binding affinity to ER β compared its binding affinity for ER α displays a full vasculoprotective effect but is devoid of any uterotrophic effect. In addition, the inventors have demonstrated that ER β is strongly upregulated in the vascular wall as a consequence of injury, whereas ER α remains expressed at a constitutive background level only.

WO 00/01716

4

PCT/GB99/02157

The discovery of a second estrogen receptor ER β , and the recent finding that disruption of the "classical" ER α gene in mice preserves the vasculoprotective effect of estrogen, offer better targeting of estrogen in vasculoprotective drug therapies. The inventors have unexpectedly demonstrated that, after endothelial denudation injury of rat carotid artery, ER α mRNA (and protein) are constitutively expressed at a low level in the vascular wall, whereas the expression of ER β mRNA increases >30-fold after injury. In *in situ* hybridization, the ER β mRNA co-localizes with the replicating and migrating SMC in the media and in the neointima. Treatment of ovariectomized female rats on a soybean deficient diet with the isoflavonic phytoestrogen genistein, which shows approximately 20x higher binding affinity to ER β than to ER α , and with 17 β -estradiol, which does not differentiate between the two receptor subtypes, at a dose range of 0.00250 through 2.50 mg/kg/d, provides on both occasions a dose-dependent vasculoprotective effect. However, treatment with 17 β -estradiol only, but not with genistein, is accompanied by a dose-dependent uterotrophic effect. Thus the vasculoprotective effect of estrogen has been for the first time differentiated from the uterotrophic effect using ligands with different binding affinity to ER β vs ER α . The *in vivo* experiments used genistein doses of less than 2 mg/kg/d, which is well known below the dose level (50 - 100 mM) where the protein tyrosine kinase inhibitory effect of genistein and isoflavones have been demonstrated. As genistein at this dose range is likely to function via the ER β , and is devoid of inhibitory effect on protein tyrosine kinases, the vasculoprotective effect of genistein is therefore mediated by ER β .

The colocalization of ER β mRNA in *in situ* hybridization on the replicating/migratory smooth muscle cells during the replicative and migratory bursts after endothelial trauma, is of relevance in explaining the results obtained. First, on day 7 after denudation injury the endothelial regrowth from both ends of the vessel is only at its very beginning (Clowes AW, *et al.* Lab Invest (1983); 49(3): 327-33) and the dose dependent inhibitory effect with both ligands may be discussed in terms of inhibition of smooth muscle cell replication, only. Although the binding affinity of genistein to ER- β is only 20-fold better than 17 β -estradiol, (the best pair of ligands at the moment to differentiate between the two receptors -Kuiper, G *et al* Endocrinology (1997); 138(3): 863-70), the anti-proliferative

WO 00/01716

5

PCT/GB99/02157

effect and the effect on intimal thickening vs. the uterotrophic effect were clearly different.

In regard to intimal thickening and *in vivo* replication after endothelial denudation, the linear plots show a slight advantage for genistein vs. 17- β -estradiol. This advantage is also seen in the *in vitro* vascular smooth muscle cell inhibition studies. However, at the tested dose range genistein displayed no uterogenic effect *in vivo*, whereas the uterogenic effect of 17- β -estradiol was clearly visible. Thus, it can be calculated that the vasculoprotective effect of the estrogen is most likely mediated via ER β . This is clearly supported by the observation of Iafrati *et al* Nat Med (1997); 3(5): 545-8 where selective disruption of the ER α gene in mice did not have an effect on the vasculoprotective effect of estrogen.

Therefore, in summary, the inventors have demonstrated that ER β is strongly upregulated in the vascular wall as a consequence of injury, whereas ER α remains expressed at constitutive low background level, only. *In situ* hybridization demonstrated that ER β mRNA co-localizes on the replicating and migrating vascular smooth muscle cells in the media and neointima suggesting that both genes are transcribed and expressed in functional form. This was tested by using two different ligands with approximately 20-fold affinity difference for ER α and ER β , 17- β -estradiol and genistein. These two ligands clearly differentiated the vasculoprotective vs. uterogenic effect. Within the dose range tested both of the ligands demonstrated a dose-dependent vasculoprotective effect, whereas only 17- β -estradiol but not genistein demonstrated a dose-dependent uterotrophic effect. Finally, the anti-proliferative effect of these two ligands on vascular smooth muscle cell cultures deriving from rat aorta was confirmed *in vitro*: a dose-dependent inhibition of smooth muscle cell proliferation was again observed.

Taken together, the results presented in this study and previous observations strongly suggest that the vascular protective effect of estrogen is mediated predominantly or exclusively by ER β . These results will enable the generation of vasculoprotective estrogen mimetics without classical uterotrophic side-effects.

WO 00/01716

6

PCT/GB99/02157

A first aspect of the invention provides a vasculoprotective composition comprising an ER β ligand, preferably an agonist, although the compound may be ER β antagonist.

In particular, post menopausal women suffer from an increased risk of vascular disease and heart disease and are therefore a target population for treatment with agonists of ER β .

This was unexpected because it was possible that the vasculoprotective effect operates via the recently-discovered ER β or by another hitherto unknown ER subtype. Another possibility was that the desired vasculoprotective effect is obtained via modification of the signalling to the response elements of "vasculoprotective" genes via intermediary transcription factors, such as SRC-1, TIF-2, AIB1, or via ER-interacting proteins, such as RIP140, RIP160, TIF1, etc.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a pharmaceutical composition useful for the treatment of vasculopathies comprising an ER β agonist.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided the use of an ER β agonist in the treatment of vasculopathies.

According to further aspects of the invention there are provided methods of treating, or preventing, a vasculopathy comprising treating a subject with an ER β agonist, preferably an ER β -selective agonist. The vasculopathy may be a fibroproliferative condition. For example, it may be a fibroproliferative condition such as restenosis, angioplasty, chronic allograft rejection, diabetic angiopathy, autoimmune angiopathy, atherosclerosis, and atherosclerosis.

According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in a subject, the method comprising contacting the subject with an ER β agonist.

WO 00/01716

7

PCT/GB99/02157

Alternatively, the vasculoprotective effect may be induced in cells, tissues such as blood vessels or organs. The cells tissues on which may have been produced *in vitro*, may than be placed in a subject. For example in a vasculoprotective effect may be induced and *in vitro* generated or seeded vascular grafts prior to implantation in humans. The gene may be inserted by a virus.

The vasculoprotective effect may be, for example, reducing intimal thickness.

Preferably, the ER β agonist is selective for ER β . For example, it may have a binding affinity for ER β which is at least 10 times, preferably at least 20 times, greater than for ER α .

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a method of producing artificial tissues or organs the method including the step of treating the tissue or organ with an ER β agonist. For example it is known to produce blood vessels by seeding cells, usually from the patient to receive the blood vessel about a former tube and growing those cells. The invention embraces artificial tissues or organs obtainable by such a method.

Methods and compositions in accordance with the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings Figs. 1 to 5, in which;

Fig. 1 shows the results of *in situ* expression of ER α and ER β at 15 min and 7 days after injury. Sense controls (not shown) were negative;

Fig. 2 shows the results of ER α and ER β expression at different time points, as quantitated as number of grains/400 μm . separately for media and neointima;

Fig. 3 shows dose response plots of 17 α estradiol and genistein on a 7 day denudation injury, as quantiated as number of intima nuclei, and on the uterotrophic effect, as quantitated as the 7 day weight of rat uteruses;

WO 00/01716

8

PCT/GB99/02157

Fig. 4 shows a dose response plot of the effect of estradiol and genistein on the proliferative response of rat vascular smooth muscle cells after serum starvation and PDGF-stimulation *in vitro*; and

Fig. 5 gives details of antibodies used in Examples.

1. Expression and localization of ER α and ER β after carotid denudation trauma in male rats

Expression and localization of ER α and ER β was investigated by *in situ* hybridisation from paraformaldehyde-fixed paraffin embedded specimens with sense controls.

Carotid denudations were made to Wistar rats purchased from the Laboratory Animal Center, University of Helsinki, Finland. The rats were anaesthetized with 240 mg/kg chloral hydrate i.p.. Buprenorphine (Temgesic, Reckitt Coleman, Hull, England) was given for peri- and postoperative pain relief. Male and ovariectomized female rats weighing 300-400g were used for all experiments.

A transverse incision of the neck was performed. A full exposure of the carotid system was made by cleaving of the ventral edge of the left sternomastoid muscle and omohyoid muscles. The proximal and distal control of the carotid artery was obtained with a 11 mm micro vascular clip. A 2-French Fogarty balloon catheter (Baxter Healthcare Corp, Santa Ana, CA) was introduced into the common carotid artery through the left external carotid artery and inflated with 0.2 ml air. To produce adequate vessel injury the catheter was passed 3 times, balloon inflated, through the common carotid artery. The external carotid artery was ligated after removal of the catheter and the wound was closed.

Evaluation of histological changes was made from midcarotid sections at 0, 15 min, 3 days, 7 days, 14 days and 30 days after denudation injury. The carotids were removed "en block" and fixed in paraformaldehyde.

Histological specimens were fixed in 3% paraphormaldehyde solution for 4 hours, transferred to saline and embedded in paraffin. The number of cell nuclei in the adventia,

WO 00/01716

9

PCT/GB99/02157

media and intima was quantitated from paraffin sections stained with Meyer's hematoxylin-eosin using 400x magnification.

For *in situ* hybridization, the left carotid of male rats was denuded of endothelium and the rats were sacrificed at 15 min, 3 days, 7 days, 14 days and 28 days after injury, with a minimum 3 of rats per time point. The specimens of different time points and the non-denuded control specimen were placed on a single organosilane-treated microscopy slide and *in situ* hybridization was performed as described below.

2. *In situ* hybridization

After deparaffinization and rehydration, sections were denatured in 0.2 M HCl, heat-denatured in 2x Saline-Sodium Citrate (SSC) at 70°C and treated with proteinase K (1 µg/ml). Sections were then post-fixed with 4% paraformaldehyde, acetylated with 0.25% acetic anhydride in 0.1 M triethanolamine, dehydrated and air-dried. Slides were hybridized with antisense or sense RNA probes (described below) overnight at 60°C, washed in 4xSSC, treated with RNase A (20 µg/ml) and washed sequentially in SSC solutions (2xSSC, 1xSSC, 0.5xSSC, all at room temperature; 0.1xSSC at 50°C; 0.1xSSC at RT) with 1mM DTT. Finally, the slides were rinsed in 0.1xSSC (with 1 mM DTT), dehydrated in graded ethanols and air-dried. Slides were dipped into autography emulsion (NBT 3, Kodak), exposed for 7-14 days, developed, counterstained, dehydrated and mounted with Permount.

3. Probe preparation

The complementary RNA probes were synthesized according to manufacturer's directions (Promega, Madison, WI) in the presence of ³⁵S-UTP (Amersham, International, Willshire, UK) using following cDNA fragments as templates. For ERβ ; a 400 bp *EcoRI*-*AccI* fragment (from the 5'UTR region) of the rat ERβ cDNA subcloned in a pBluescript KS vector was linearized with *EcoRI* or *AccI* enzymes for the production of antisense and sense transcripts, respectively. For ERα, a 200 bp *Bst**XI*-*EcoRI* fragment (from the 3' UTR, F-domain region) of the rat ERα cDNA subcloned to a Bluescript vector was linearized with *SacI* or *EcoRI* enzymes prior to synthesis of antisense and sense probes, respectively. RNA probes transcribed from opposite strands of the same plasmid template, yielding

WO 00/01716

10

PCT/GB99/02157

antisense and sense probes, were adjusted to the same specific radioactivity (minimum 10 000 cpm/ μ l).

Control non-denuded carotids were compared to denuded carotids removed at 15 min, and 3, 7, 14, and 30 days post denudation. To ensure that the expression levels between different specimens were comparable, all tissue specimens were placed on one slide and hybridized in identical conditions either for ER α or β .

ER α and β mRNAs were expressed constitutively at low level in the vascular tunica media in normal non-denuded carotids. The level of expression of ER α mRNA remained unaltered throughout the experiment as can be seen from Figs. 1 and 2.

Figure 1 shows the *in situ* expression of ER α and ER β in rat carotid seven days past denudation. Antisense RNA probes were used with the Lumen (L) facing up. Compared to specimens obtained 15 minutes post denudation, ER β expression is strongly enhanced in the media (MED) and particularly in the vascular intima (INT) whereas the level of ER α expression was not elevated.

Figure 2 shows the time course of the events. Male rats were denuded as previously described, and the animals were sacrificed at the same points, i.e 15 minutes, 3, 7, and 14 days post injury. Three-fold up-regulation of ER β mRNA was observed three days after denudation in the media and the level of expression in the media increased to 8-fold on day 7, whereafter it declined. Even more prominent changes in the expression levels were observed in the hyperplastic intima/neointima. Whereas the ER α expression in the intima remained at the level observed in the control vessel media, or at most doubled, the level of ER β expression in the intima increased nearly 40-fold on day 7 (Fig. 2), whereafter it declined but remained elevated even after 14 days post injury.

4. Dose responses to 17 β -E2 and genistein on post denudation carotid trauma and on uterine weight in female rats.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

11

Female adult rats were ovariectomized on day -7 and carotid denudation was performed on day 0 and the animals were killed on day 7 (at the end of the experiment also the uterus was removed, weighed and histology was performed).

Female rats were ovariectomized, placed on a soy-bean free diet (Special Diet Services, UK) (to eliminate effects of phytoestrogens from the diet) for 7 days and both carotids were denuded. One group of animals received 17 β -estradiol (17 β -E2) (Sigma, St Louis, MO) and the other group genistein (kindly donated by Dr. William Helferich, Michigan State University, or purchased from Plantech, UK) at reducing doses from 2.5 mg/kg/d s.c. downwards, whilst the third group received vehicle only and served as control. 17 β -E2 and genistein were dissolved in dimethylsulphoxide (Sigma). Animals were weighed daily, and both drugs were administered subcutaneously (s.c.) using the following doses: 2.5, 0.25, 0.025 and 0.0025 mg/kg in one s.c. injection per day. The animals were killed at 7 days post injury, the uterus and both carotids were removed, the uterus was weighed and both organs were processed for histology as previously described.

Ten denuded carotids of rats receiving only vehicle (DMSO 200 ml/kg/day) were compared to denuded carotids of rats receiving 17- β estradiol and to carotids of rats receiving genistein at escalating doses of 0.0025, 0.025, 0.25 and 2.5 mg/kg/d, three to five carotids at each dose level.

Both 17 β -E2 and genistein had a dose-dependent effect on nuclear number in intima, but no measurable effect on the number of nuclei in the media (not shown). (Fig. 3). The line plots indicate that genistein might have been slightly more efficacious (r^2 0.838 vs 0.746) in its vasculoprotective effect.

On the other hand, in the dose range employed, only 17- β estradiol displayed a dose-dependent stimulatory effect on uterine weight (r^2 0.954) while genistein had no effect (r^2 0.96) (Figure 3).

WO 00/01716

12

PCT/GB99/02157

5. Effect on estradiol vs genistein on SMC replication *in vivo*

An aqueous solution of 5-bromo-2'-deoxyuridine and 5-fluoro-2'-deoxyuridine (Zymed Laboratories, Inc, San Francisco, CA) was used for labelling of proliferating cells after denudation. For "pulse labelling" a dose of 400 µl of labelling suspension was injected i.v. according to manufacturer's instructions, and the rats were killed exactly 3 h after the pulse. The carotids were fixed as described above and processed for paraffin embedding. BrdU stainings of cross sections were performed using a mouse primary antibody (Bu20a, Dako, A/S, Denmark) and Vectastain Elite ABC kit (Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA). Sections were deparaffinized and microwave-treated at 500 W for 2 x 5 min in 0.1 M citrate buffer, pH 6, followed by treatment in 95% formamide in 0.15 M tri-sodium citrate at 70°C for 45 min. Antibody dilutions were made according to manufacturer's instructions. Sections were counterstained with Mayers' haematoxylin and eosin, and the number of positive cells was counted separately from the intimal, medial and adventitial layers.

Both of these ligands also reduced, dose dependently, the replication rate in the intima, as quantitated by the number of BrdU incorporating cells after pulse labelling of the rat.

Table 1 shows the effect of E2 and genistein on the number of proliferating (BrdU-incorporating) cells in the vascular intima seven days after denudation injury.#

Drug dose (mg/kg/d)	No of BrdU incorporating cells	
	17β estradiol	genistein
Nil	36.7 ± 7.5	
0.0025	27.3 ± 12.5	32.3 ± 12.
0.025	6.0 ± 3.8	6.0 ± 3.8
2.5	10.5 ± 2.9	12.3 ± 3.7

Animals received BrdU pulse 3 hours before sacrifice.

WO 00/01716

13

PCT/GB99/02157

6. Dose-responses to 17 β -E2 and genistein on vascular smooth muscle cell proliferation *in vitro*.

As the results regarding the *in vivo* responses of genistein vs 17 β -E2 to vascular trauma suggested a marginally better efficacy of genistein, this possibility was investigated further *in vitro* in the proliferation assays of vascular smooth muscle cells. Rat thoracic aorta smooth muscle cells at 10-12 passage were plated in 96 well tissue culture plates on day -2, left to attach phenyl-red free RPMI 1640 and deprived from serum for additional two days. On day 0, the cells were stimulated by 20 ng/ml Platelet-Derived Growth Factor-B (PDGF-B) (Sigma), or left non-stimulated. Genistein and 17- β estradiol were added to the cultures at the indicated concentrations on day -1, and all cultures were harvested on day 1 after a 24 hour ³H-thymidine (³H-TdR) pulse on day 1.

As seen in Figure 4, both E2 and genistein displayed a dose-dependent anti-proliferative effect on baby rat smooth muscle cells in culture.

7. Expression and localization of ER α AND ER β in primates after carotid denudation trauma

Because species differences may exist in gene expression, we wanted to confirm the rat results described above in subhuman primates and also to extend the observations to other types of vasculopathies, particularly to allograft fibroproliferative vascular disease in a rat cardiac transplant model and to human cardiac transplantation.

Baboons are a particularly useful animal model as they have 98% sequence identity with the human genome.

Carotid/iliac denudations were performed to baboons Balloon catheter denudation of carotid arteries was performed in 8 male baboons (*Papio ursinus*) weighing 16-18 kg. Additional 4 baboons served as non-operated controls. The animals were purchased from the Animal Laboratory of the Medical Faculty, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. The baboons were sedated with ketamine hydrochloride (5mg/kg IM) and anesthesia was

WO 00/01716

14

PCT/GB99/02157

induced with thiopental sodium (5mg/kg IV) and maintained with inhaled halothane. Prophylactic cefazolin sodium (25mg/kg IM, Eli Lilly) was administered and the left common carotid artery was explored by vertical neck incision following the anterior border of sternocleidomastoid muscle. The carotid system was exposed in the carotid triangle and proximal and distal control of the common carotid artery was obtained with small vascular clamps, just proximal to its bifurcation. No heparin was administered. Through a small arteriotomy, a 4-Fr Fogarty balloon catheter (Baxter Healthcare Corp, Santa Ana, CA) was introduced into the distal common carotid artery. It was passed retrograde into the aortic arch and inflated with 1.7 ml of air resulting in a 1.5 lbs pull force and a balloon size of 9 mm when inflated. The inflated balloon was then retrieved under tension while rotating the shaft of the catheter to produce uniform injury. This was repeated three times to ensure sufficient arterial denudation. All procedures were done by the same individual. The catheter was then removed; the arteriotomy closed with interrupted 7-0 monofilament polypropylene sutures, and flow restored. The wound was then closed in layers and buprenorphine (Temgesic, Reckitt, Coleman, Hull, England) 0.25mg/kg IV was given as required, for postoperative pain relief. One baboon was sacrificed at each time point by administering an overdose of pentobarbital (100 mg/kg IV) and IV potassium chloride. Three minutes before extermination, standard heparin (300U/kg IV) was given. Both carotid arteries were then removed and evaluation of histological changes was made from midcarotid sections at 0, 15 min and at 2, 3, 4, 7, 14 and 28 days post injury.

Pieces of rat uterus were obtained for ER- α specificity controls.

All animals received humane care in compliance with guidelines set forth by the National Institutes of Health, publication No. 86-23, Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, and the project was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Immunohistochemistry was made from paraffin cross sections using a mouse or rabbit primary antibody and Vectastain Elite ABC kit (Vector Laboratories, Burlingame, CA). Sections were deparaffinized and microwave-treated at 500 W for 2 x 5 min in 0.1 M citrate buffer, pH 6, followed by treatment in 95% formamide in 0.15 M tri-sodium citrate

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

15

at +70°C for 45 min. Antibody dilutions were made according to manufacturers instructions. Sections were counterstained with Mayers haematoxylin and eosin, and the total number of positive cells was counted separately from the intimal, medial and adventitial layers using 400x magnification. At least 5 sections were investigated separately of each carotid and the specimen with median intensity of intimal changes was counted.

In the baboon carotid/iliac denudation model 4 baboons were sacrificed w/o injury and at least 1 baboon was sacrificed at 15 min, 2, 3, 4, 7, 14 and 28 d time points post injury. ER β was found as exclusive receptor in baboon arteries and ER α in baboon uterus. After injury, the intensity of immunohistochemical staining with all three commercial antibodies for ER β increased considerably and staining colocalized with the vascular SMC. There was no staining with ER α antibodies though the control uterus stained strongly.

ER β was the only ER located in the baboon arteries found by immunohistochemistry. Specifically tissue samples were contacted with commercially-available ER β or ER α -selective antibodies.

The staining colocalized with vascular SMC.

8. Analysis of ER α and ER β expression in rat and human allograft vessels.

In rat and human heart allograft vessels ER β is the exclusive receptor and ER α in uterus. During acute rejection, the ER β was shown to be strongly upregulated (same panel of antibodies) and ER α remain non-existent.

Human specimens were obtained from routine endomyocardial biopsies performed for diagnostic purposes to U of Helsinki Hospital heart transplant recipients. The biopsies represented no rejection, acute rejections of different histological intensities and of chronic rejection, least 10 specimens per group.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

16

Rat heart transplants were made to abdominal vessels as described (Lemstrom, K., Sihvola, R., Bruggeman C., Häyry, P., and Koskinen, P. abolished by DHPG prophylaxis in the rat. Circulation 1997;95:2614-2616).

Specimens for immunohistochemistry were obtained as described above in relation to baboons.

and following antibodies shown in Fig. 5 were employed, with consistent results:

In rat and human heart allograft vessels ER β was also found to be the exclusive receptor and ER α dominated in uterus. During acute rejection, the staining for ER β was strongly upregulated (same panel of antibodies) and the ER α reactivity remain non-existent.

Taken together, the expression patterns of ER β vs. ER α in subhuman primates and in human and rat allograft models entirely agree with the rat carotid results described in the application and demonstrate ER β as the exclusive estrogen receptor in arterial tissue and vascular SMC making this a ideal target for drug therapies.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

17

Claims

1. A vasculoprotective composition comprising an ER β ligand.
2. A vasculoprotective composition according to claim 1 wherein the ER β ligand is an ER β agonist.
3. A vasculoprotective composition according to claim 1 wherein the ER β ligand is an ER β antagonist.
4. A vasculoprotective composition according to claim 1 or claim 2 comprising an ER β -selective agonist.
5. A pharmaceutical composition useful for the treatment of vasculopathies comprising an ER β agonist.
6. A pharmaceutical composition according to claim 5 comprising an ER β -selective agonist.
7. A composition according to claim 4 or 6 in which the binding affinity of the ER β agonist to ER β is at least 10 times greater than the binding affinity to ER α .
8. A composition according to claim 7 in which the binding affinity of the agonist to ER β is at least 20 times greater than to ER α .
9. The use of an ER β agonist in the treatment of vasculopathies.
10. The use of an ER β -selective agonist in the treatment of vasculopathies.
11. The use according to claim 10 in which the vasculopathy is a fibroproliferative condition.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

18

12. The use according to claim 11 in which the fibroproliferative vasculopathy is selected from restenosis, angioplasty, chronic allograft rejection, diabetic angiopathy, autoimmune angiopathy, arteriosclerosis, and atherosclerosis.
13. A method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in a subject, the method comprising treating the subject with an ER β agonist.
14. A method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect according to claim 13 in which the ER β agonist has a higher affinity for ER β than ER α .
15. A method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in a subject according to claim 14 in which the binding affinity of the agonist to ER β is at least 10 times greater than to ER α .
16. A method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in a subject according to claim 15 in which the binding affinity of the agonist to ER β is at least 20 times greater than to ER α .
17. A method of inducing a vasculoprotective effect in which the effect is decrease of intimal thickness.
18. A method according to any one of claims 13 to 17 in which the vasculoprotective effect is induced to treat a fibroproliferative vasculopathy.
19. A method according to claim 18 in which the fibroproliferative vasculopathy is selected from restenosis, angioplasty, chronic allograft rejection, diabetic angiopathy, autoimmune angiopathy, arteriosclerosis and atherosclerosis.
20. A composition, use or method according to any preceding claim in which the ER β selective agonist is genistein or a chemical derivative or structural analogue thereof.
21. A use or method according to any one of claims 9 to 20 in which uterotrophic effects are minimised or do not result.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

19

22. A method according to any one of claims 13 to 21 in which the subject is a mammal.
23. A method according to claim 22 in which the mammal is a primate.
24. A method according to claim 23 in which the mammal is human.
25. A method according to claim 22, 23 or 24 in which the mammal is female.
26. A method according to claim 25 in which the female is post-menopausal.
27. A method of producing artificial tissues or organs the method including the step of treating the tissue or organ with an ER β agonist.
28. A method according to claim 27 in which the tissue or organ is a blood vessel.
29. Artificial tissues or organs obtainable by a method according to claim 27 or 28.

WO 00/01716

1/5

PCT/GB99/02157

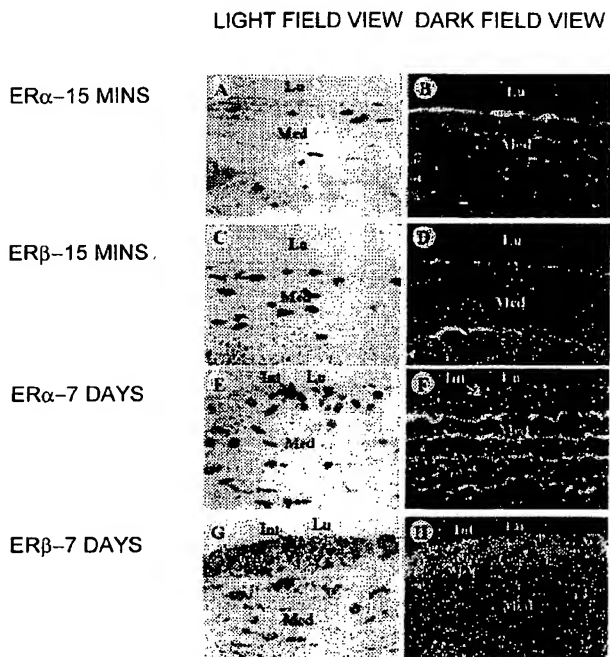


FIG. 1

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

2 / 5

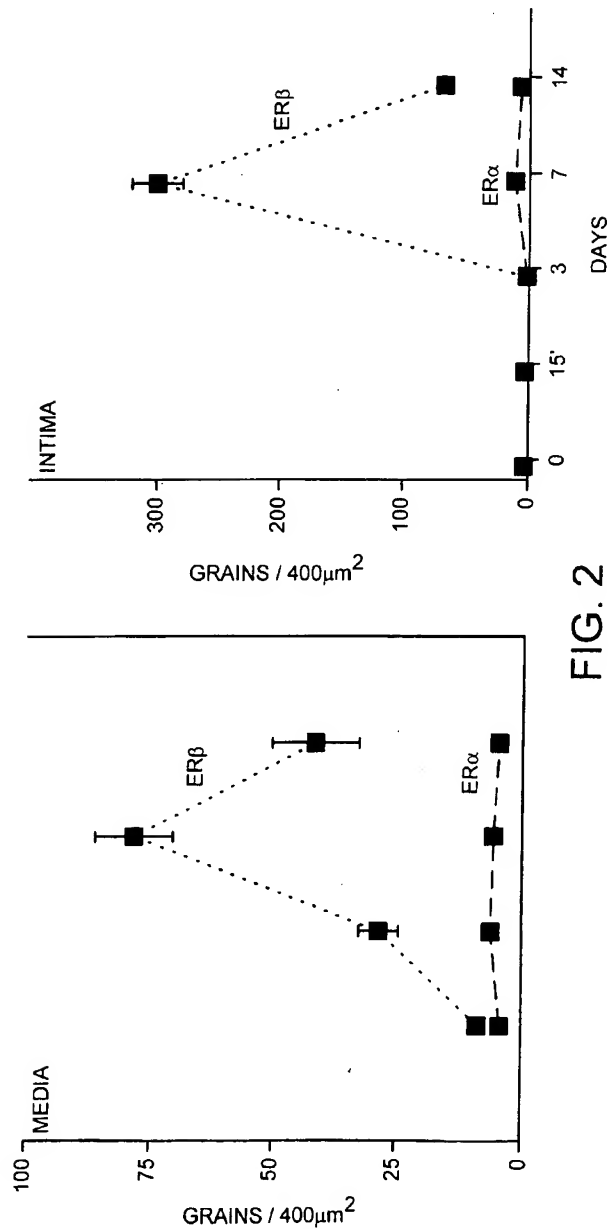


FIG. 2

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

3 / 5

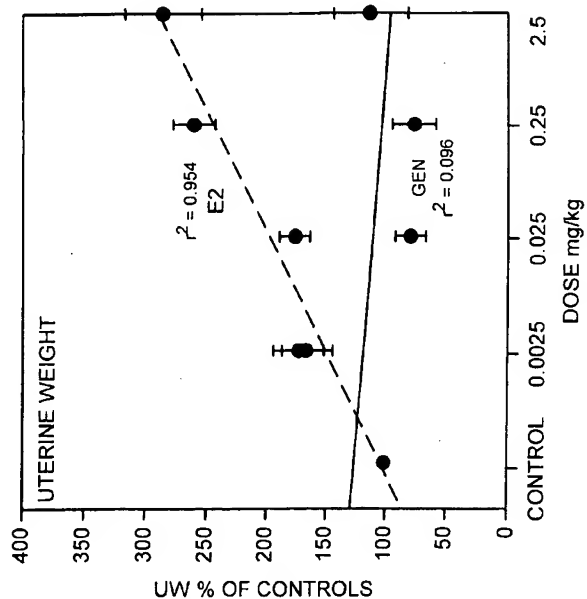
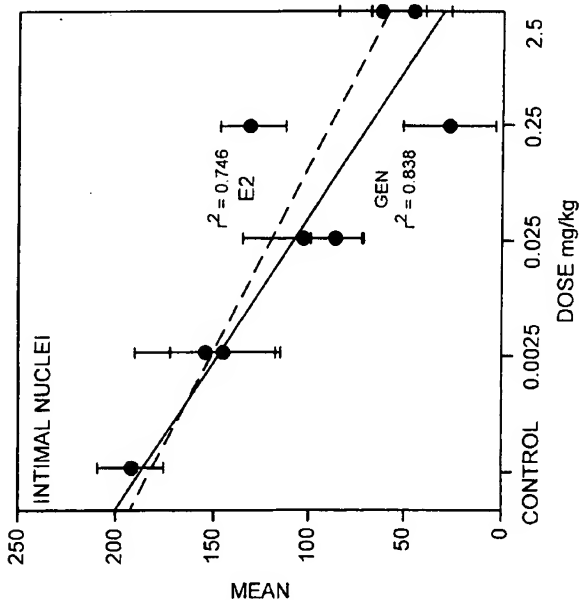


FIG. 3



BINDING AFFINITY K_i (nM) OF 17α ESTRADIOL AND GENISTEIN TO $ER\alpha$ AND $ER\beta$ IS, RESPECTIVELY, 0.13 AND 0.12 FOR E2 AND 2.6 AND 0.3 FOR GEN.

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

4 / 5

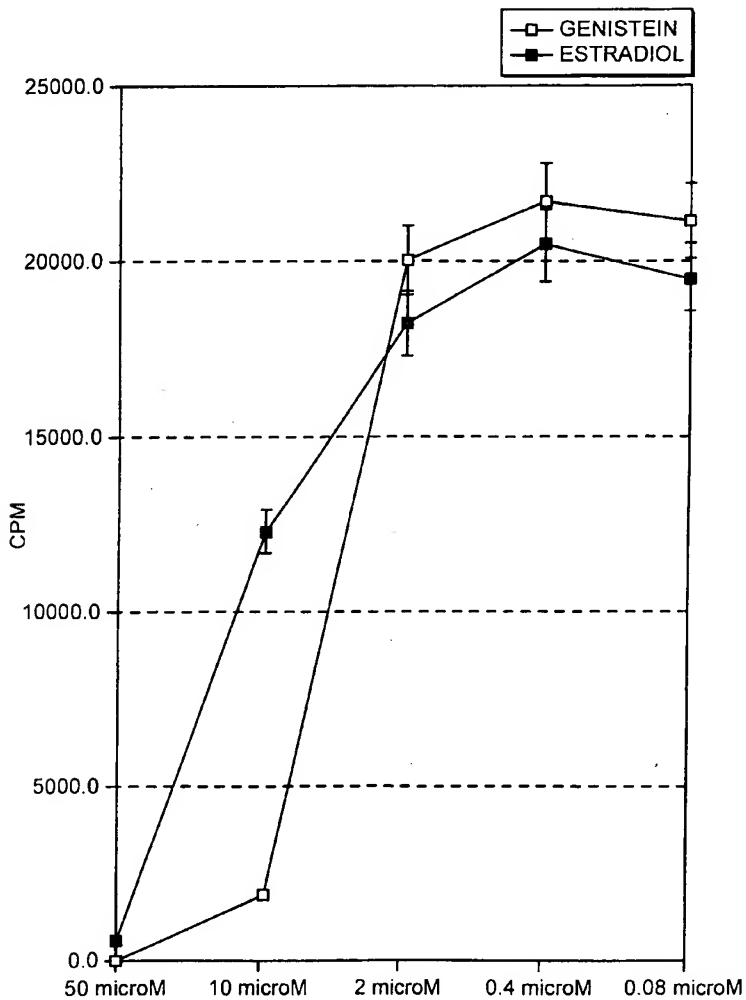


FIG. 4

WO 00/01716

PCT/GB99/02157

5 / 5

Gene	Species	Type	Structure reactivity	Selectivity / working concentration	Antigen / recombinant ant	Conc.	Cell	Company	References
Estrogen- α -type nuclear	Rat	Rabbit	Human	IHC 10 μ g/ml IP	Synthetic peptide aa 54-71 of rat mouse As 48-63 of human	200 μ g of protein A purified IgG in 200 μ l 0.1 M Tris-glycine	0B-628	Upstate biotechnology	Enmark, E. L., et al., Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA 83: 5925-5930, 1986. Byers, M., et al., Mol. Endo. 11: 172-182, 1997
Estrogen- α -type cytoplasmic	Human	Mouse	Human	IHC 1:50-1:100 IP	Purified, 5026-6emula- red cat uterus ER-receptor	200 μ g of protein A purified mouse IgG in 400 μ l of 10mM PBS	0B-384	Upstate biotechnology	Evans, R. M., Science 240: 869-865, 1988. Green, S., et al., Nature 324: 615-617, 1986
Estrogen- α -type nuclear	Human	Mouse	Human	IHC 1:40-1:80 Flows	Procytic recombi- nant protein con- sisting of the full length alpha form of the ER-receptor mo- lecle	Lymphoid tissue culture supernatant 7mM Aque	NCLER-611	Novocastra	Bent, D. J., Poyet, N., et al., New monoclonal antibodies to estrogen and progesterone receptors effective for paraffin section IHC. Journal of Histochemistry 183: 228-232, 1987. Clark, G. M., McGee, W. L., The distal nucleolus of oestrogen-receptor and other markers of hormone dependence. Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh 95B: 145-150, 1985. Henry, J. A., Angles, B., Horne, C. H. W., Oestrogen receptor and oestrogen regulated proteins in human breast cancer: a review. J. Endo. Journal of Medicine 36: 241-261, 1990. Shewski, P., et al., J. W., Detection of oestrogen receptors with monoclonal antibodies in routinely processed formalin-fixed paraffin sections of breast carcinoma. American Journal of Clinical Pathology 87: 161-167, 1987.
Estrogen- α -type nuclear	Human	Mouse	Human	IHC 1:50-1:75 WB	N-term. domain of the ER-receptor (AB region)	Recombinant human ER-receptor protein [Issue culture super- natant / ml RPMI 1640]	M 7047	DAKO	Kumar, V., et al., Functional domains of the human estrogen receptor. Cell 51: 941-51, 1987. Santoro, P., Shouha, S., Demonstration of estrogen receptors in paraffin wax sections of breast carcinoma using the monoclonal antibody 1D5 and microwave oven processing. J. Clin. Pathol. 47: 803, 1994
Estrogen- α -type cytoplasmic	Rat	Rabbit	Rat	IHC 5:10 μ g/ml WB 1 μ g/ml	rat peptide COOH-terminal aa 467-485	Southern PBS Control peptide	PA1-310 PEP-007	ABR	Li, X., Schwartz, P. E., Rasmussen, E. F., Distribution of oestrogen receptor- related immunoreactivity in rat forebrain. Neuroendocrinology 66: 63-67, 1997
Estrogen- α -type cytoplasmic	Rat	Rabbit	Rat	IHC 1:3 μ g/ml WB 1:3 μ g/ml	rat peptide NIR-terminal aa 52-10	Southern PBS Control peptide	PA1-311 PEP-011	ABR	Alves, S. E., et al., Differential colocalization of estrogen receptor beta with estrogen and vasopressin in the paraventricular and supraoptic nuclei of the female rat brain. An immunocytochemical study. Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA 85(6): 3261-3266, 1988
Estrogen- α -type nuclear	Human	Mouse	Human	IHC 5 μ g/ml IP 5 μ g/ml WB 5 μ g/ml (1 μ g/ml)	human peptide DNA binding dom. aa 247-261	Southern PBS (pre-diluted Aures) Control peptide	MA1-310 PEP-013	ABR	Trush, A., et al., Development and characterization of monoclonal antibodies to a specific domain of human estrogen receptor. Steroids 55: 199-208, 1990

FIG. 5